

STANDING RULES OR OPERATING PROCEDURES

Many neighborhood organizations find it helpful to adopt “standing rules” or “operating procedures” separate from the bylaws. These rules generally may be changed more easily than bylaws may be amended. The purpose of such rules is to have agreement of the members about how to conduct meetings and other activities. Such rules should never be in conflict with the bylaws – they should address more detailed procedures than are covered in the bylaws. The key concept of standing rules or operating procedures is that they reflect the desires of the current board or member and are changed when the desires/needs of the group change. The following is a sample of some very simple standing rules for all meetings:

- One person speaks at a time
- Speak from your own experience
- No put-downs of self or others
- No cross talk (i.e. no side conversations or interrupting the speaker to dispute points).

Some groups include a list of the committees established for the current year in their standing rules. They may also describe the method for selection of committee chairs (i.e. Does the board chair appoint committee chairs or do committee members elect their own chair?). The rules may also incorporate detailed descriptions of board, committees, and committee chair responsibilities.

While all the matters described above could be described in bylaws, including them in standing rules instead of the bylaws helps communicate to current members of the group that these are their rules, representing their choices. This prevents the problem of bylaw bog-down by many volunteer groups. Because bylaws are designed to be the major, long-term governing document, the process for amending them is designed to assure careful consideration. Bylaws that are overly detailed in describing operating procedures go out of date quickly as board and membership composition shifts. Many groups don’t have time or choose to use time to amend the bylaws and allow procedures to vary from those detailed in the bylaws. If the group keeps operating procedures out of the bylaws and changes them easily, it can maintain compliance more easily and have the advantage of clear written rules as a shared basis for operations.